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Letter dated 18 June 2015 from the Permanent Representatives of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

We have the honour to write to you on behalf of Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, the Central African Republic, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay and Yemen.

We express our outrage regarding the continued bloodshed and violence against civilians in Syria caused, in particular, by the systematic use of barrel bombs and stress the urgent need for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015) and the importance of full compliance with international humanitarian law.

May 2015 was reportedly the deadliest month of the Syrian crisis to date. In recent weeks, helicopters of the Syrian air force repeatedly bombarded heavily populated areas in and around Aleppo, leaving hundreds of civilians dead and dozens of others wounded, with many victims blown to pieces or burned beyond recognition. Those attacks, which the international community condemned, were among the most brutal perpetrated since the start of the Syrian crisis.

Tragically, those barrel bomb attacks in Aleppo were the latest in a long line of the grisly and horrific use of aerial weapons, including barrel bombs, that have been launched by the Syrian air force on crowded urban areas, such as markets and bakery queues, hospitals and medical facilities, schools and places of worship, transportation hubs and residential buildings throughout the course of the Syrian crisis, leaving thousands dead. The investigations of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic established by the Human Rights Council reinforce the finding that the main cause of civilian casualties, mass displacement and destruction is the deliberate targeting of civilians, indiscriminate attacks, attacks on civilians and protected objects, and the punitive imposition of sieges and blockades.

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On 8 June, the Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, reiterated his condemnation of the use of barrel bombs. On 30 May, he had qualified the situation as "totally unacceptable" and added that all evidence showed that the overwhelming majority of the civilian victims in the Syrian conflict had been caused by the use of such indiscriminate aerial weapons by the Syrian air force. He also stressed that the protection of civilians during armed conflicts was a cornerstone of international humanitarian law.

The indiscriminate use of weapons, including barrel bombs, is prohibited under international humanitarian law. We recall in that regard Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), in which the Council demanded that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs.

The Syrian authorities must cease indiscriminate aerial attacks. On behalf of our respective Governments, we call upon the Security Council to advance its efforts to ensure implementation of its existing resolutions on Syria and to prevent the future use by the Syrian air force of any such aerial bombardment, including its use of barrel bombs. We also urge that the Council reinforce efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all those in need throughout Syria. We saw through the adoption of resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014) what can be done when the Council acts together and speaks with one voice.

We also recall that violations and abuses committed in Syria may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We are firmly of the view that the international community must take steps to ensure justice for the victims of the Syrian crisis by bringing to justice, without exceptions, all alleged perpetrators of crimes.

We emphasize that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution and urge all parties to work towards the comprehensive implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 leading to a genuine political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future. We fully support the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria in this regard.

We would appreciate it if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bénédicte **Frankinet**
Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Sylvie **Lucas**
Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Karel **van Oosterom**
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of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations